

PART II: THE QUR'ANIC RESEARCH PROCESS

Islamic epistemology, as articulated in the Qur'an (القرآن), integrates observation (*nazar* - نَظَر), reflection (*tafakkur* - تَفَكَّر), reason ('*aql* - عَقْل), and revelation (*wahy* - وَحْي) into a unified methodology for acquiring and transmitting knowledge. While Part I examined the metaphysical foundations of 'ilm (عِلْم) and the Qur'anic conceptualisation of knowledge as a divine trust, Part II transitions into the operational domain of knowing - the Qur'anic research process (*manhaj al-baḥth al-Qur'ani* - مَنَهْجُ الْبَحْثِ الْقُرْآنِي). This process delineates how the human intellect engages with the world through observation (*nazar* - نَظَر), experiential travel (*sair fi al-ard* - سَيْرٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ), analytical contemplation (*tafakkur* - تَفَكَّر), deep reflection (*tadabbur* - تَدَبَّر), moral remembrance (*tadhakkur* - تَذَكَّر), validation through proof (*burhan* - بُرْهَان) and evidence (*bayyina* - بَيِّنَةٌ), synthesis into wisdom (*ḥikmah* - حِكْمَةٌ), application through faith and action ('*amal* - عَمَل, *iman* - إِيْمَان), transmission of truth (*da'wah* - دَعْوَةٌ, *Tabligh* - تَبْلِيغ), and finally, preservation of divine knowledge (*dhikr* - ذِكْر, *Kitab* - كِتَاب). Together, these interlinked stages form a complete epistemic cycle that unites empirical reality with divine guidance.

The Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to “see,” “travel,” “reflect,” “remember,” and “convey” the *ayat* (آيَات) - the signs dispersed throughout creation. These imperatives construct an investigative and communicative framework rooted in empirical observation, rational inquiry, moral responsibility, and spiritual consciousness. Unlike secular empiricism, which isolates perception from metaphysical meaning, the Qur'anic method envisions exploration as an act of worship ('*ibadah* - عِبَادَةٌ). Observation of nature, human society, and history becomes a mode of witnessing the *ḥaqq* (حَقّ) - the truth manifest in all layers of existence (Nasr, 2007; Al-Attas, 1980). Knowledge, therefore, is not pursued for material mastery or instrumental control but as a sacred act of recognising divine order and aligning the human intellect with the will of Allah (الله).

The Qur'anic research process advances through a dynamic continuum linking the senses, intellect, and spirit. Human perception begins with *nazar* (نَظَر) - careful observation and empirical attentiveness - which expands through *sair fi al-ard* (سَيْرٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ) - movement and exploration across the natural and social world. These experiences become the data of divine communication, requiring *tafakkur* (تَفَكَّر) - analytical contemplation, and *tadabbur* (تَدَبَّر) - deep reflection - to discern underlying meanings. *Tadhakkur* (تَذَكَّر) then internalises these insights morally, ensuring that knowledge does not remain theoretical but becomes transformative. Through *burhan* (بُرْهَان) and *bayyina* (بَيِّنَةٌ), knowledge is verified and purified of speculation, aligning human understanding with divine truth. Finally, *ḥikmah* (حِكْمَةٌ) synthesises these dimensions, representing the state where intellect, morality, and revelation converge into coherent understanding (Izutsu, 2002).

From this synthesis emerges the applied phase - '*amal* (عَمَل) and *iman* (إِيْمَان) - where knowledge manifests through ethical action and existential faith. The Qur'an consistently joins these two - “those who believe and do righteous deeds” (Q. 103:3) - to signify that knowing without doing remains incomplete. Yet, the

Qur'anic epistemic cycle does not end with application; it extends toward communication and preservation. Da'wah (دَعْوَة) and Tabligh (تَبْلِيغ) ensure that knowledge is shared and truth is conveyed to others with clarity, wisdom, and compassion (Q. 16:125). Through these, knowledge transcends individual cognition and becomes a collective moral enterprise.

Finally, dhikr (ذِكْر) and Kitab (كِتَاب) represent the last and most enduring movement in the Qur'anic epistemological cycle - the preservation of divine wisdom through remembrance and writing. In these acts, the Qur'an ensures both personal continuity (through remembrance in the heart) and historical continuity (through preservation in the text). Together, they safeguard revelation from distortion and oblivion, fulfilling the divine promise: *"Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder (dhikr), and surely We will preserve it"* (Q. 15:9).

Chapter 4: Observation (Nazar, Sair): The Empirical Foundation of Qur'anic Inquiry

The Qur'an establishes *nazar* (observation) and *sair fi al-ard* (travel upon the earth) as the foundational acts of knowing. These commands are more than descriptive or poetic expressions; they form the cognitive and moral base of Islamic epistemology. Observation in the Qur'an is not limited to sensory engagement—it represents a moral responsibility to witness the signs (ayat) of the Creator manifested in the universe. Similarly, travel is not a mere act of movement but a method of encountering divine patterns within natural and historical realities. Together, *nazar* and *sair* mark the beginning of the Qur'anic research process, integrating empirical awareness with spiritual realisation. Through them, the Qur'an invites humanity to transform perception into recognition, observation into reflection, and experience into wisdom.

Observation and travel are the two pillars through which the Qur'an situates human knowledge within divine creation. The repeated exhortations, such as “Do they not look at the camels, how they are created?” (Q. 88:17) and “Travel through the earth and see how He began creation” (Q. 29:20), establish a theology of seeing and experiencing. The Qur'an, through these commands, constructs an epistemological discipline in which empirical engagement is both sacred and obligatory.

Unlike secular epistemologies that divide sense experience from metaphysical inquiry, the Qur'an binds them into a unified act of knowing. Observation in the Qur'anic framework involves both the outer eye (*basar*) and the inner heart (*Fu'ad*), the two instruments through which knowledge is verified and internalised (Q. 67:23; 22:46). Seeing, therefore, is not complete without inward reflection. The Qur'an describes those who “have eyes but do not see” (Q. 7:179) as spiritually blind, suggesting that perception devoid of insight remains epistemologically inert.

Travel (*sair*) extends this epistemic command beyond the local and immediate. It transforms the entire earth into a laboratory of divine signs. Through travel, one encounters diversity in creation, societies, and civilisations, leading to moral and intellectual realisation. The Qur'an consistently links travel with reflection upon past nations and natural orders (Q. 12:109; 30:9; 40:82). Thus, empirical exploration is both historical and ontological—it unveils the temporal traces of divine laws operating within creation.

This chapter develops a Qur'an-centred understanding of *nazar* and *sair* as empirical foundations of Islamic knowledge. It explores observation as a disciplined way of perceiving (*nazar*), travel as an experiential mode of engagement (*sair*), and their integration in a continuum that bridges the physical and the spiritual. Together, they illustrate how the Qur'an transforms the act of knowing into an act of *ibadah* (worship), where seeking knowledge is synonymous with recognising the signs of Allah in the cosmos and within oneself (Q. 51:20-21).

4.1 Nazar: Seeing as Knowing

The Qur'anic term *Nazar* (نظر) embodies more than physical vision; it is the act of thoughtful observation that transforms perception into knowledge. Rooted in the triliteral form *n-z-r*, it conveys seeing, examining, and contemplating with intention and purpose. Within the Qur'an, *Nazar* becomes a primary

epistemic command—an invitation to engage the natural and moral order as signs (*ayat*) of divine wisdom. The act of looking is not passive; it is an instrument of understanding that connects the sensory with the intellectual. Observation (*Nazar*) thus serves as a bridge between empirical reality and spiritual cognition, shaping the very foundation of Qur'anic inquiry.

4.1.1 The Linguistic and Conceptual Field of Nazar

Linguistically, *Nazar* signifies “to look attentively,” “to reflect,” or “to deliberate upon.” The Qur'an uses the term and its derivatives across contexts of natural phenomena, human conduct, and divine revelation. The command “*Afala yanzuruna ila al-ibili kayfa khuliqat*” (*Do they not look at the camels, how they were created?* Q. 88:17) exemplifies the directive to engage one's senses as part of spiritual cognition. Similarly, *Nazar* appears in moral reflection: “*Afala yanzuruna ila al-malikut as-samawati wa al-ard*” (*Do they not look at the dominion of the heavens and the earth?* Q. 7:185).

In both cases, the Qur'an redefines vision as an act of reason. *Nazar* implies discernment—seeing *through* phenomena rather than merely *at* them. It thus integrates sensory perception (*hiss*) and rational analysis (*'aql*), creating an epistemic unity between observation and inference (Rahman, 1988).

4.1.2 Nazar as Epistemic Engagement

Observation in the Qur'an is never detached from purpose. The Qur'an transforms the empirical act of seeing into an intellectual and moral activity. When humans are urged to “*look at what is in the heavens and the earth*” (Q. 10:101), the command goes beyond curiosity—it calls for recognising the signs of divine order within empirical existence. *Nazar* becomes a moral obligation to perceive creation as a manifestation of divine will.

This epistemological stance opposes both blind empiricism and blind faith. Unlike Greek empiricism, which isolates sense-data from transcendence, the Qur'an's concept of *Nazar* integrates observation within the moral domain of *Tawhid*—the unity of truth (Nasr, 1996). Empirical data thus gain value only when interpreted through divine meaning. Observation, for the Qur'an, is a sacred act: a form of worship through cognition.

4.1.3 Nazar and the Cognitive Ethic

The Qur'an presents *Nazar* as a moral discipline. The act of seeing demands responsibility; the observer is accountable for what they ignore or misread. When the Qur'an laments, “*They have eyes but do not see with them*” (Q. 7:179), it identifies epistemic negligence as a spiritual ailment. True observation requires openness of the heart (*qalb*) as much as acuity of the eyes.

The Qur'anic epistemology of *Nazar* thus entails a triadic harmony among the senses, the intellect, and the heart. This framework replaces the Cartesian dualism between subject and object with an integrated consciousness of being. Observation is not an end in itself; it is a means of *ma'rifah* (recognition of truth). The Qur'an, therefore, elevates *Nazar* to a sacred cognitive duty, where empirical observation becomes a path to moral insight and ontological awareness (Izutsu, 2002).

4.1.4 Nazar and Natural Phenomena

The Qur'an repeatedly directs human attention to natural processes as empirical evidence of divine wisdom: the alternation of night and day (Q. 3:190), the formation of clouds (Q. 24:43), and the diversity of life (Q. 35:27-28). Each phenomenon becomes an *ayah*-a sign requiring interpretive vision. The natural world is an open text, and *Nazar* functions as the method of its exegesis.

By urging observation, the Qur'an introduces a proto-scientific ethos grounded in ethical monotheism. The believer's inquiry is not utilitarian but reverential. Science, when guided by *Nazar*, becomes an extension of revelation-empirical exploration sanctified by divine purpose (Sardar, 1989). Thus, *Nazar* represents the Qur'anic model of scientific inquiry, where seeing is inseparable from believing.

4.1.5 Nazar and Self-Observation

The Qur'an extends observation inward: "And in yourselves, do you not then see?" (Q. 51:21). Here, *Nazar* transforms from external perception to introspection. Self-observation becomes an epistemic act; the human being is both the observer and the observed. This reflexivity unites cosmological and psychological understanding, leading to a holistic epistemology.

The Qur'an, therefore, envisions *Nazar* as an ontological dialogue between the self, the cosmos, and the Creator. By integrating outer and inner vision, the human mind becomes a microcosm of divine signs. This recursive model of knowing-seeing the world and seeing oneself seeing-constitutes the Qur'anic definition of consciousness (al-Attas, 1980).

In Qur'anic epistemology, *Nazar* represents the synthesis of observation, reflection, and recognition. It transforms empirical inquiry into spiritual awareness. To "see" in the Qur'an is to *understand with reverence*, engage creation as a living text of divine meaning. Hence, *Nazar* establishes the empirical foundation of Qur'anic inquiry: observation as a sacred, cognitive, and moral act that unites perception and faith.

4.2 Sair: Travel as Epistemic Engagement

The Qur'anic concept of *Sair* (سير)-derived from the root *s-y-r*, "to move" or "to travel"-represents dynamic observation through engagement with the world. Unlike passive seeing, *Sair* involves motion, experience, and transformation. It is the epistemology of movement: learning through journeying. The Qur'an repeatedly commands, "*Qul siru fi al-ard fa-unzuru kayfa kana 'aqibat al-mukadhibin*" (*Travel through the earth and see what the end of those who denied the truth was*; Q. 6:11). Here, travel becomes an instrument of empirical and moral discovery investigative pilgrimage across time, geography, and human history.

4.2.1 The Semantics of Sair

The root *s-y-r* occurs in multiple Qur'anic contexts, denoting physical motion (*yasiruna fi al-ard*), *the movement of celestial bodies* (Q. 21:33), and the moral journeys of nations. *Sair* encapsulates both physical travel and existential progression. It signifies movement toward comprehension, where the earth itself

becomes a didactic field of signs (*ayat*). As Izutsu (2002) notes, *Sair* in the Qur'an transforms geography into pedagogy: every landscape carries epistemic weight.

4.2.2 Travel as Inquiry

Travel in the Qur'an is an empirical act: a command to witness civilisations, ruins, and natural systems as repositories of moral and historical knowledge. When the Qur'an asks humankind to "travel through the land and see what was the end of those before you" (Q. 30:42), it establishes historical observation as a means of wisdom. Empirical travel becomes historiography, a method of moral learning through the remains of the past.

The epistemological significance of *Sair* lies in its active engagement. Unlike theoretical reflection (*Tafakkur*), *Sair* demands encounter. The traveller is a researcher-experiencing phenomena firsthand, gathering data through the senses, and interpreting signs through intellect. This dynamic methodology foreshadows modern field research but remains grounded in spiritual accountability. Knowledge is not collected for domination but for ethical transformation (Sardar, 2011).

4.2.3 Sair and the Unity of Space and Time

The Qur'an employs *Sair* to unify spatial and temporal consciousness. To travel is to move not only through geography but also through history. The ruins of vanished civilisations-'Ad, Thamūd, and Pharaoh-become material testimonies to moral law (Q. 40:82-85). The traveller, by witnessing their traces, partakes in a temporal dialogue between past and present.

This historical consciousness is the Qur'an's empirical pedagogy: the earth is a living archive, and *Sair* is its method of reading. By integrating travel with remembrance (*dhikr*), the Qur'an sacralizes history as moral epistemology (Rahman, 1988).

4.2.4 Travel and Environmental Observation

Beyond human history, *Sair* extends to natural ecosystems. The Qur'an invites humanity to explore mountains, seas, and skies-not merely to admire them, but to discern divine harmony. "And He made you traverse the earth and sail the seas so that you may seek of His bounty" (Q. 17:66). Travel thus embodies ecological consciousness; it situates human beings within a living order. Observation through *Sair* encourages environmental responsibility: awareness of interdependence between creation and Creator (Nasr, 1996).

4.2.5 Sair and Moral Transformation

The Qur'an associates travel with humility and self-renewal. Through *Sair*, humans confront the impermanence of power and the continuity of divine justice. The traveller's awareness matures through exposure to diversity, decay, and renewal. Travel becomes a moral mirror: movement through the world reflects the inner journey toward truth.

The ethical function of *Sair* contrasts sharply with materialistic exploration. Whereas modern travel often seeks exploitation or pleasure, the Qur'an defines travel as moral education-knowledge through encounter and empathy. The traveller who "sees" rightly (*fa-unzuru*) becomes a witness to divine order, not a consumer of novelty (al-Attas, 1980).

4.2.6 *Sair* as Integration of Empiricism and Revelation

In the Qur'anic epistemic model, *Sair* mediates between empirical observation (*Nazar*) and moral reflection (*Tadhakkur*). It transforms the act of movement into a cognitive process. The traveller's senses gather empirical data, the intellect interprets them, and the spirit internalises their meaning. Thus, *Sair* integrates experience and revelation, embodying the unity of truth across creation.

This synthesis eliminates the dichotomy between "scientific" and "spiritual" knowledge. The Qur'an defines true science as observation conducted in remembrance of God, and true spirituality as knowledge enacted in the world (Rahman, 1988; Sardar, 1989).

In Qur'anic epistemology, *Sair* transcends geography; it is an ontological motion toward awareness. Through travel, humanity encounters both the outer world and its inner self. The Qur'an transforms the earth into a classroom of divine instruction and travel into a methodology of discovery. *Sair*, when guided by remembrance, becomes the movement of consciousness toward truth—a sacred journey uniting empirical knowledge and spiritual awakening.

4.3 The Empirical-Spiritual Continuum

In Qur'anic epistemology, the act of knowing is not confined to the empirical realm, nor is it detached into mystical abstraction. The Qur'an establishes a continuum between empirical observation (*Nazar*) and spiritual consciousness (*Tadhakkur*). This integration forms the epistemic unity of Islam: sensory experience, rational reflection, and spiritual realisation are not competing modes but complementary dimensions of a single process of knowing. The empirical-spiritual continuum thus represents the Qur'an's holistic vision of cognition, in which every act of perception is both scientific and sacred.

4.3.1 The Qur'anic Epistemic Unity

The Qur'an explicitly situates knowledge (*'ilm*) within a unified ontology governed by *Tawhid*—the oneness of divine truth. In this worldview, all knowledge, whether derived from sense perception or revelation, originates in and returns to God. "He taught man what he knew not" (Q. 96:5) establishes divine teaching as the source of cognition, while "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth" (Q. 41:53) emphasises experiential verification. These verses integrate outer and inner domains of inquiry: *ayat fi al-afaq* (signs in the horizons) and *ayat fi anfusihim* (signs within themselves).

Thus, the Qur'an abolishes the modern dichotomy between empiricism and spirituality. Knowledge begins with observation but is fulfilled in recognition (*ma'rifah*). The physical and metaphysical are not opposites but coordinates of divine reality.

4.3.2 Empirical Observation as Spiritual Praxis

Empirical study in the Qur'an is not secular but sacred. The command to “*look at what is in the heavens and the earth*” (Q. 10:101) is inseparable from the moral call to gratitude and humility. The act of observation carries within it the possibility of spiritual transformation. When one contemplates the cycles of creation, the alternation of night and day, or the balance of ecosystems, one encounters the divine pattern underlying existence.

Observation (*Nazar*) thus becomes a spiritual praxis—an act of remembrance (*dhikr*). Seeing rightly is remembering God. The Qur'an's empirical ethic transforms ordinary perception into worship, for “*Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for those who possess understanding—those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth*” (Q. 3:190-191).

This verse demonstrates the continuum between empirical reflection (*yatafakkaruna*) and spiritual remembrance (*yadhkuruna*). Observation is not isolated from consciousness of the divine; rather, it becomes the path through which spiritual awareness is renewed.

4.3.3 From Observation to Realisation

The Qur'an constructs knowledge as a movement from sensory engagement to spiritual realisation. This transition occurs through reflection (*tafakkur*), deep insight (*tadabbur*), and remembrance (*tadhakkur*). The empirical process provides the data of experience, while the spiritual faculty interprets them through the lens of meaning. “*Do they not look into the dominion of the heavens and the earth?*” (Q. 7:185) invites empirical analysis, but the purpose of this analysis is to awaken the heart (*qalb*).

In Qur'anic language, the heart is not a metaphor for emotion but a cognitive organ capable of comprehension and moral judgment. “*Have they not travelled through the land so that their hearts may reason?*” (Q. 22:46). Here, the physical act of travel (empirical engagement) leads to inner perception (spiritual realisation). The Qur'an, therefore, treats empiricism as a spiritual discipline that refines the moral and cognitive capacities of the observer (Izutsu, 2002).

4.3.4 The Unity of Signs: Nature, History, and Self

The Qur'an describes three domains of signs (*ayat*): the natural world, human history, and the self. Each of these invites empirical engagement but culminates in spiritual insight. The alternation of seasons (Q. 45:5), the rise and fall of nations (Q. 30:9), and the mysteries of human consciousness (Q. 51:21) together constitute a single revelatory continuum. The believer who observes nature scientifically, history ethically, and the self introspectively participates in a unified epistemic act.

This triadic system undermines the Western compartmentalisation of sciences and humanities. For the Qur'an, knowledge of the stars and knowledge of justice belong to the same order of truth because both disclose aspects of divine unity. The empirical-spiritual continuum thus redefines the purpose of knowledge: not to control, but to comprehend; not to dominate, but to align with divine order (Nasr, 1996).

4.3.5 Spirituality as the Ethical Limit of Empiricism

The Qur'an grants legitimacy to empirical inquiry but binds it to moral purpose. Knowledge without spiritual consciousness becomes destructive. “*They know the outward of the life of this world, but they are heedless of the Hereafter*” (Q. 30:7). This verse delineates the pathology of secular empiricism-observation devoid of transcendental orientation. True science in the Qur'anic sense must therefore operate within ethical and teleological bounds, recognising that every fact participates in a moral cosmos (al-Attas, 1980).

The spiritual dimension provides the *niyyah* (intent) that purifies empirical inquiry from arrogance. The act of studying the world becomes an act of returning it to meaning. Thus, spirituality does not negate empiricism; it perfects it.

The Qur'an envisions knowledge as a single continuum connecting sensory experience with divine consciousness. Observation and spirituality are two phases of one process: seeing creation and remembering the Creator. This continuum forms the epistemological foundation of Islamic inquiry-a vision where the laboratory and the place of prayer are extensions of the same quest for truth.

4.4 Observation in the Prophetic Paradigm

The Prophets in the Qur'an are portrayed not as passive recipients of revelation but as *active observers* of the world and society. Their observation is both empirical and moral-a disciplined engagement with reality guided by divine insight. Without appealing to external traditions, the Qur'an itself portrays prophetic cognition as a model of integrated seeing (*Nazar*), reflection (*Tafakkur*), and remembrance (*Tadhakkur*). This section explores the Qur'anic depiction of prophetic observation as the highest form of empirical-spiritual engagement.

4.4.1 Prophetic Observation as Cognitive Praxis

The Prophets' encounters in the Qur'an illustrate the epistemic unity of observation, reason, and revelation. Abraham's observation of the celestial bodies (Q. 6:75-79) exemplifies an empirical inquiry that leads to metaphysical realisation. He observes the stars, the moon, and the sun-not as idols to be worshipped, but as phenomena to be analysed. Through this process, Abraham transitions from empirical seeing to ontological certainty: “I have turned my face toward Him who created the heavens and the earth” (Q. 6:79).

This narrative encapsulates the prophetic method: observation interpreted through rational reflection, culminating in spiritual affirmation. Abraham's empirical reasoning, conducted within divine awareness, becomes a model for the epistemology of revelation.

4.4.2 Moses: Observation as Social Awareness

The Prophet Moses represents another dimension of observation, social and moral perception. The Qur'an describes his sensitivity to injustice and his ability to perceive the moral order beneath social phenomena. His encounter with Pharaoh's tyranny and the suffering of his people (Q. 28:3-14) displays observational

awareness extended into ethical action. Moses “sees” oppression not as abstract information but as a moral imperative.

Observation, in the prophetic paradigm, demands engagement. To witness wrongdoing without responding is epistemic blindness. The Prophet’s knowledge is inseparable from responsibility, for true perception requires transformation of self and society. Hence, the Qur’an aligns observation with justice, making moral responsiveness a condition of knowing (Rahman, 1988).

4.4.3 ‘Isa and the Vision of Life

The Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), in Qur’anic perspective, embodies perceptive insight into the spiritual dimension of existence. His acts-breathing life into clay, healing the blind, and restoring the dead to life by divine permission (Q. 3:49)-represent not supernatural spectacle but epistemic symbols: vision restored, perception renewed, consciousness revived. His “healing of the blind” is an emblem of removing epistemic blindness, transforming ignorance into insight.

Thus, prophetic observation is not limited to the external senses but includes the inner awakening of the heart. The Prophets demonstrate that spiritual awareness is the deepest form of seeing-perception that transcends materiality to discern the essence of truth (Izutsu, 2002).

4.4.4 Observation and the Prophetic Method of Inquiry

The Qur’an presents the Prophets as inquirers who use the world as a laboratory of meaning. Their method integrates empirical data, rational analysis, and divine revelation. This triadic approach contrasts with secular empiricism by uniting knowledge with ethical teleology.

For instance, Solomon’s attention to the speech of birds (Q. 27:16) and Joseph’s interpretation of dreams (Q. 12:43-49) illustrate sensitivity to both natural and symbolic orders. Each Prophet reads creation as a network of signs. The prophetic method, therefore, exemplifies *semiotic empiricism*-the art of decoding reality through divine symbols.

4.4.5 Observation as Revelation: The Prophetic Witness

The Qur’an characterises Prophets as *shuhada’*-witnesses to truth. Their witnessing arises from observation that reveals the moral and ontological order of existence. “*We made you a community of the middle path so that you may be witnesses over humanity, and the Messenger a witness over you*” (Q. 2:143). The prophetic model thus transfers to the community of believers, who must emulate this witnessing through observation aligned with justice and awareness.

To observe as the Prophet observes is to see with moral clarity-to recognise both the visible and the invisible dimensions of phenomena. Such witnessing transforms knowledge into accountability.

4.4.6 The Prophetic Ethic of Perception

Prophetic observation is guided by humility. The Prophets never claim ownership of knowledge; they act as custodians of divine insight. This humility safeguards observation from arrogance. “*And they do not*

encompass anything of His knowledge except what He wills" (Q. 2:255). This verse encapsulates the epistemic posture of the Prophet: complete awareness of the limits of human knowledge within divine omniscience.

In this paradigm, the act of observing becomes a form of submission (*Islam*). Knowledge acquired through observation is a sacred trust, not personal possession. The Prophet's way of knowing thus establishes a moral template for all human inquiry-seeing with respect, interpreting with justice, and acting with responsibility (al-Attas, 1980).

4.4.7 Observation and Revelation: No Dichotomy

The Prophets in the Qur'an do not experience a conflict between reason and revelation. Their observation is illuminated by divine guidance. Revelation (*wahy*) provides the interpretive framework that gives empirical data moral direction. When revelation commands observation, it sanctifies science; when it instructs reflection, it elevates philosophy. Thus, the prophetic paradigm abolishes the dichotomy between empiricism and spirituality.

Each Prophet becomes a model of integrated epistemology. Abraham symbolises empirical reasoning; Moses, moral perception; Jesus, spiritual vision; and Muhammad, though not analysed here through extra-Qur'anic sources, represents the synthesis of all three, for the Qur'an itself is the final articulation of this epistemic unity (Nasr, 1996).

The prophetic paradigm of observation presents a complete model of Qur'anic inquiry. Prophets observe with intellect, act with justice, and remember with humility. Observation becomes a form of revelation in action—a movement from perception to realisation. By emulating the prophetic way of seeing, humanity is invited to re-engage the world as a text of divine signs, integrating science, ethics, and spirituality into one continuous act of knowing.

4.5 Toward an Empirical Ethic

The Qur'an presents observation (*nazar*) and travel (*sair*) not merely as acts of inquiry, but as moral and epistemological duties. The act of seeing is bound by ethical responsibility, and the act of knowing carries moral consequence. The Qur'anic methodology transforms empirical engagement into a process guided by divine consciousness (*taqwa*) and justice (*'adl*). Observation is not a neutral act; it is charged with purpose, value, and accountability. In the Qur'anic worldview, to observe is to witness the signs (*ayat*) of Allah within creation, and to interpret them in ways that promote harmony between human intellect and divine truth (Q. 41:53; 6:75). Thus, an *empirical ethic* emerges—one in which knowledge derived from sensory experience is directed toward moral growth, stewardship, and remembrance of divine unity.

4.5.1 The Moral Dimension of Observation

Empirical investigation, according to the Qur'an, is not amoral or secularised; it is deeply moralised. The observer is accountable not only for what is seen but for the interpretation and application of that sight. Allah repeatedly calls humankind to *look* and *consider* the signs of the heavens and the earth (Q. 3:190-

191; 10:101). These verses link *nazar* (observation) to *dhikr* (remembrance) and *'aql* (reason), implying that observation devoid of moral orientation risks distortion.

For instance, Qur'an 30:8 warns: *"Do they not reflect within themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth and what is between them except in truth and for a specified term."* The Qur'an thus situates empirical observation within the context of truth (*haqq*) and temporality, suggesting that all observation must lead to recognition of divine purpose rather than mere accumulation of data. The ethical essence of observation is therefore to discern order, not to exploit it.

4.5.2 Observation as Stewardship (Khilafah)

Human beings are entrusted as vicegerents (*khaliiah*) upon the earth (Q. 2:30). This stewardship transforms observation into a form of trusteeship. The empirical study of creation is, therefore, not an act of domination but of moral responsibility. Observation becomes a means to fulfil the covenant (*mithaq*) between humanity and the Creator, wherein knowledge must serve preservation rather than corruption (*fasad*). The Qur'an declares: *"Do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption"* (Q. 2:11; 7:56). Here, the prohibition implies that misuse of knowledge or empirical discovery violates the moral contract embedded in observation.

The Qur'an's emphasis on balance (*mizan*) reinforces this ethic. Allah commands, *"And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance, that you not transgress within the balance"* (Q. 55:7-8). Empirical pursuit, therefore, must respect ecological and moral equilibrium. Observation that ignores the balance becomes unethical, regardless of its scientific success. The *mizan* principle provides the metaphysical foundation of what may be called a Qur'anic environmental ethic, rooted in seeing creation as a trust, not a resource to be exhausted.

4.5.3 Knowledge and Accountability

The Qur'an links knowledge (*'ilm*) with accountability (*hisab*). Human beings will be questioned not only for their actions but also for their epistemic engagements-how they used the faculties of sight, hearing, and intellect: *"Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart-about all those [one] will be questioned"* (Q. 17:36). This verse establishes an ethical framework for empirical activity. The act of observation must lead to moral awareness, not arrogance. The misuse of sensory faculties for deceit, materialism, or oppression is condemned (Q. 45:23; 7:179).

This accountability extends to collective knowledge production. Societies that suppress inquiry or distort truth are also culpable. The Qur'an denounces communities that deny signs after witnessing them (Q. 6:157; 10:39). Thus, epistemic ethics operates both individually and socially, emphasising transparency, honesty, and humility in the pursuit of knowledge. In this light, Qur'anic epistemology prefigures modern concerns about ethical science and moral responsibility in discovery.

4.5.4 Observation as Worship

The Qur'an transforms empirical acts into worship (*'ibadah*) when guided by remembrance of Allah. Observation becomes a means of drawing nearer to the Divine through recognition of His signs. Qur'an 51:20-21 declares: “*And on the earth are signs for those of sure faith, and in yourselves-do you not see?*” Here, the empirical and the spiritual intersect; observation is not secular seeing but a contemplative act that integrates outer perception and inner reflection. Such a vision elevates science from mere curiosity to devotion. The Qur'an invites humankind to a perpetual form of worship through discovery.

Thus, empirical ethics in the Qur'an demands humility before the Creator. The Qur'an condemns those who see the signs but remain blind to their meaning (Q. 7:179). Knowledge must yield gratitude, not arrogance. The ultimate test of empirical ethics lies in whether observation leads to remembrance (*dhikr*), moral balance (*mizan*), and justice (*'adl*).

4.5.5 The Integration of Rationality and Spirituality

The Qur'an's call to observe integrates two dimensions of knowing: empirical (*hissi*) and spiritual (*ruhani*). The Qur'an never separates these modes but unites them under the principle of *tawhid*-the unity of truth. Rational inquiry without spiritual anchoring risks fragmentation, while spirituality without empirical grounding risks abstraction. The Qur'anic model thus advocates a *harmonised empiricism* where observation serves both intellectual growth and moral reform.

This synthesis is vividly represented in verses such as Qur'an 6:99, where the process of rainfall, vegetation, and fruit-bearing is described not only as natural phenomena but as *ayat*-signs demanding reflection. The empirical process is simultaneously theological. Thus, every act of seeing becomes a bridge between material evidence and divine meaning.

4.5.6 The Formation of an Empirical Ethic

From these principles, one can construct a Qur'an-based empirical ethic rooted in five interrelated values:

- Taqwa (God-consciousness) - Observation must be undertaken with awareness of divine presence and purpose.
- Adl (Justice) - Knowledge should aim at equity and should not contribute to corruption or exploitation.
- Amanah (Trust) - The natural world is a trust from Allah; empirical engagement must preserve its integrity.
- Shukr (Gratitude) - Every discovery is a reminder of divine mercy, leading to humility and thankfulness.
- Tawhid (Unity) - All knowledge, whether empirical or metaphysical, originates from and points back to the One Creator.

Thus, an empirical ethic in the Qur'anic sense transcends utilitarian science. It situates the human observer within the moral order of creation, transforming every act of discovery into an act of moral witness.

Observation in the Qur'anic framework is far more than sensory engagement-it is a moral, spiritual, and epistemological journey. Through the twin concepts of *nazar* and *sair*, the Qur'an establishes an empirical foundation grounded in responsibility and transcendence. The Qur'an invites humanity to witness the signs of creation as evidence of divine wisdom and unity, encouraging a reflective empiricism that balances discovery with humility and knowledge with worship.

The Qur'anic model rejects the dichotomy between empirical science and faith. It envisions an integrated epistemology in which observation, contemplation, and remembrance form a continuum of knowing. The ethical parameters of this process ensure that knowledge serves divine order rather than human arrogance. The empirical act becomes sacred when guided by the principles of *taqwa*, *mizan*, and *'adl*. Through this lens, science and spirituality are not competitors but collaborators in unveiling truth.

In conclusion, the Qur'an proposes an *empirical ethic* that unites the faculties of perception and intellect with moral consciousness. Observation is an act of stewardship, inquiry is an act of devotion, and knowledge is a trust. In this holistic vision, humanity's engagement with the world becomes a path to both intellectual illumination and spiritual fulfilment. The Qur'an thus redefines empiricism as a sacred pursuit-one that unveils the divine in the material, the infinite in the finite, and the moral in the observable.